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SC PULLS UP NTA OVER NEET LEAK, SAYS IT HAS NOT LEARNT LESSONS

The court on Monday sought the response of the Centre, NTA and CBI on pleas to replace the National Testing Agency with an autonomous one

NTA ASKED TO DETAIL STEPS TAKEN SINCE 2024

Pointing to the 2024 leak of the NEET paper, the Supreme Court asked the testing agency what steps it has taken since. "It's sad they have not learnt their lessons. The matter travelled to this court earlier also. There was a committee which made some recommendations and they were accepted. We want the NTA to file an affidavit on the steps taken," the court said | P9

PLEAS SEEK NEW BODY TO CONDUCT EXAM

- The court issued the notices while hearing a batch of pleas, including one by the Federation of All India Medical Association
- The medical body has urged the court to issue a direction to restructure or replace NTA with a robust and autonomous system
- The concerned parties have three days to submit their responses

Friday

WHEN THE COURT WILL HEAR THE MATTER AGAIN

CHENNAI ▪ MADURAI ▪ VIJAYAWADA ▪ BENGALURU ▪ KOCHI ▪ HYDERABAD ▪ VISAKHAPATNAM ▪ COIMBATORE ▪ KOZHIKODE ▪ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM ▪ BELAGAVI ▪ BHUBANESWAR ▪ SHIVAMOGGA ▪ MANGALURU ▪ TIRUPATI ▪ TIRUCHY ▪ TIRUNELVELI ▪ SAMBALPUR ▪ HUBBALLI ▪ DHARMAPURI ▪ KOTTAYAM ▪ KANNUR ▪ VILLUPURAM ▪ KOLLAM ▪ TADEPALLIGUDEM ▪ NAGAPATTINAM ▪ THRISSUR ▪ KALABURAGI

MEKEDATU

SC rejects review plea of TN govt

SUCHITRA KALYAN MOHANTY
@New Delhi

IN a significant development, the Supreme Court dismissed a review petition filed in the Mekedatu case, rejecting the Tamil Nadu government's request that the hearing — seeking a review of the order dated November 13, 2025 — be conducted in an open court rather than in the judges' private chambers.

A three-judge bench dismissed the Tamil Nadu government's review petition. "Therefore, this review petition is dismissed. Consequently, if there are any pending interlocutory applications, they are also deemed to be disposed of," the bench ordered.

The Tamil Nadu government had filed a petition in the Supreme Court in 2018 with the following prayers:

(i) To stay the permission granted on November 22, 2018, by the Central Water Commission to the Karnataka Cauvery Neeravari Nigam Limited to proceed with the preparation of the Detailed Project Report (DPR) for the Mekedatu Project.

(ii) To issue a directive to the Central Water Commission to withdraw the letter dated November 22, 2018 — issued to the managing director of the Karnataka Cauvery Neeravari Nigam Ltd — giving permission to prepare the detailed project report for the proposed Mekedatu Balancing Reservoir and Drinking Water Project. P7

Trump now ties deal with Iran to Abraham Accords

Asks Arab countries and Pakistan to sign the Accords as part of peace pact

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

US President Donald Trump tied the future of any Iran agreement to a dramatic expansion of the Abraham Accords, signalling a broader geopolitical push to reshape alliances across West Asia. The move came alongside Trump sharply recalibrating expectations around ongoing negotiations with Tehran, warning that any agreement with Iran would either be "meaningful" or there would be "no deal at all."

"The deal with Iran will either be a great and meaningful one, or there will be no deal," Trump said. Earlier in Tehran, Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Esmaeil Baghaei acknowledged progress in negotiations but cautioned against expectations of an imminent breakthrough.

In a Truth Social post on Monday, Trump said he was "mandatorily requesting that all countries immediately sign the Abraham Accords" — a diplomatic framework introduced during his first term to normalise ties between Israel and Arab states. The countries he referenced included Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Pakistan, Türkiye, Egypt, Jordan besides the UAE and Bahrain, both already signatories to the accords.

The statement marked a shift in tone after Trump had earlier suggested that an agreement to end the nearly three-month conflict with Iran was "largely negotiated".

Besides, the inclusion of Pakistan in Trump's list adds another layer of complexity. Islamabad has historically refused to recognise Israel without the establishment of a Palestinian state based on pre-1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio sought to temper speculation surrounding a breakthrough during his visit to India. He added that the US would either secure a "strong agreement" with Iran or confront the country "another way," while insisting diplomacy would still be given "every chance to succeed."

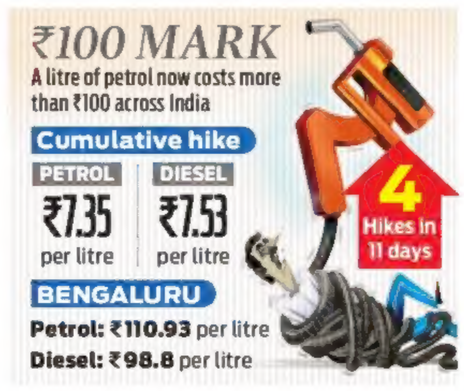
We thought we might have some news (peace agreement) last night, maybe today... I wouldn't read too much into it

Marco Rubio, US Secretary of State

Iranian team in Qatar for talks

Iran's parliament speaker and top negotiator Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, foreign minister Abbas Araghchi, and central bank chief Abdolnaser Hemmati reached Qatar on Monday to discuss "the most sensitive unresolved issues" in reaching a potential deal with the US to end the three-month-old war. Reports said the delegation held talks with Qatar's prime minister. Meanwhile, Trump said negotiations with Iran are "proceeding nicely"

Petrol, diesel prices increased yet again



RAKESH KUMAR @ New Delhi

GOVERNMENT-owned oil marketing companies (OMCs) on Monday increased petrol and diesel prices for the fourth time in 11 days by ₹2.61 and ₹2.71 per litre, respectively, taking the cumulative increase to ₹7.35 per litre for petrol and ₹7.53 for diesel.

With the latest hike, petrol prices have crossed the ₹100-per-litre mark across the country with Delhi recording ₹102.12.

The prices vary in states due to local taxation. In Telangana, a litre of petrol will now cost ₹118.30 while the figure is ₹114.90 in Kerala. Petrol in Mumbai was priced at ₹111.21 and diesel ₹97.83, while Kolkata prices rose to ₹113.51 and ₹99.82, respectively.

Diesel prices also crossed the ₹100 mark in Telangana (₹106.7) and Kerala (₹104.1).

Monday's increase came even as global oil prices fell sharply amid hopes for a deal to end the US-Israel war on Iran. Brent crude fell more than 5% on Monday.

According to the government, however, OMCs still lose around ₹600 crore per day.

320 stranded mid-air for hrs in Gulmarg cable car

FAYAZ WANI @ Srinagar

ABOUT 320 tourists were stranded mid-air for several hours after a technical glitch halted the gondola cable car system at the ski resort of Gulmarg in Jammu and Kashmir on Monday afternoon.

The panic-stricken tourists were rescued after an eight-hour-long operation involving personnel from the National Disaster Response Force, the State Disaster Response Force, the Army, and the local police. Their work was hampered by heavy rains in the area.

Rescue personnel reached people trapped inside 63 cabins of the gondola with the help of ladders. They were brought to the ground safely using ropes. Many cabins were hanging at a height of about 500 ft.

Director General of Police (DGP), Nalin Bhagat, said the operation was completed in the evening, and all the tourists were rescued. There were no reports of any injury. Officials said an investigation will be launched to determine what caused the technical snag.

The Gulmarg Gondola, one of the world's highest cable car projects, operates in two phases. Phase 1 at Kongdori stands at 10,006 ft, and Phase 2 at Affarwat is 12,959 ft above sea level. The base station at Gulmarg is located at an altitude of 8,694 ft. Operations for both phases were immediately suspended.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah praised the rescue forces. "The nation salutes the forces for their valour and skill," Shah said in a post on X.

Rescue operation underway; (inset) a tourist being rescued | PTI

Trapped 500 ft above

Officials said since many cabins were hanging 500 ft above ground, rescue work took considerable amount of time

Is this it? CM, DCM in New Delhi for crucial meet with Congress top brass

DEVARAJ B HIREHALLI @Bengaluru

THE Congress high command will most likely put an end to the power tussle between Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, as both leaders have been summoned to Delhi for a high-voltage meeting scheduled to be held at AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge's residence at 11 am on Tuesday.

Depending on the situation, Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi could take part in the meeting, which will be attended by AICC General Secretary (Organisation) KC Venugopal too.

"I cannot comment on this. Rahulji will speak," was Kharge's cryptic reply while talking to a news agency in Delhi on Monday.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and AICC General Secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala at a press meet in Bengaluru on Monday | SHASHIDHAR BYRAPPA

Rahul's message for the meeting was conveyed by Venugopal, first to Siddaramaiah on Sunday and Shivakumar on Monday, indicating that a decision on either a change in leadership or cabinet reshuffle would be taken in the presence of both leaders. The much-anticipated meeting will be decisive if Rahul too takes part in it.

The power tussle between the two leaders has been lingering since November 2025, and Shivakumar has been insisting that the high command should take a decision based on the agreement, which was struck between him and Siddaramaiah in 2023 when the party won the Assembly elections, to share power for two-and-a-half years each.

Tuesday's meeting is a clear indication that Shivakumar has got an opportunity to make his strongest-ever bid to stake claim to the chief minister's seat.

CM: NOT AWARE OF AGENDA P4

EXPRESS READ

Siddu launches upgraded 108 emergency healthcare system

Bengaluru: Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Monday inaugurated the upgraded 108 Emergency Service Command and Control Centre here. The system aims at strengthening emergency healthcare services across the state through the use of advanced technology | P5

SC asks media not to record statements in Twisha case

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Monday directed the Madhya Pradesh government to ensure that the alleged dowry death case of Twisha Sharma is handed over to the CBI. It also urged the media not to record the statements of witnesses or any potential accused | P10

NIA raids in J&K in terror funding case linked to Jamaat-e-Islami

Srinagar: The National Investigation Agency on Monday conducted searches in Kashmir as part of its probe into a terror-funding case linked to the banned Jamaat-e-Islami. The searches were conducted at three locations, including the Darul Uloom Sirajul Uloom | P10

MAJOR MOVE

Privatisation of power distribution in state on cards

BOSKY KHANNA @Bengaluru

SOON, consumers will have the option of choosing which vendor they want to buy electricity from and at what cost.

In a major move, the state energy sector has opened its doors for privatisation on the lines of Odisha, Delhi, Mumbai and others. Tata Power Company has applied before the Karnataka Electricity Regulatory Commission (KERC) for a distribution licence to supply electricity in select jurisdictions of BESCOM (Bengaluru), HESCOM (Hubli-Dharwad), CESC (Mysuru) and MESCOM (Mangaluru). The company applied recently, KERC officials said. The company has sought distribution rights in Belagavi, Uttara Kannada, Dharwad, Mysuru, Chamarajanagar, Hassan, Bengaluru Rural, Chikkaballapur, Kolar, Ramanagara, Tumakuru, Chitradurga, Shivamogga, Dakshina Kannada and Udupi.

KERC Chairman P Ravi Kumar said the company applied under Section 14 of the Karnataka Electricity Act 2002, which was passed in 2003, allowing people/agencies to apply for distribution licences. But they should have their own network and infrastructure. First, the company's appeal will be published, later, objections will be called for and then the final hearing will be done. The entire process will take some time, he added.

"This cannot be called privatisation as it is only private distribution. Though these provisions existed for the last 20 years, this is the first time that a company has applied," Kumar said.

A senior official in the energy sector explained that when the Act was being finalised, there was a discussion whether private companies should lay their own lines or use the existing network of government agencies and ask consumers to pay for it. But since nothing was finalised and ESCOMs were not keen to share their infrastructure, private agencies in other states laid their own lines and generated electricity, both conventional and renewable.

"Whether the appeal is realised or not, it is an indication that the monopoly that ESCOMs enjoyed will end. Though nothing has been said on the tariffs, they will be competitive, offering better deals to consumers. This is a first for Karnataka and ESCOMs have to get serious," the official said. P6

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